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Rediscovering Institutions:
A Reflectivist Critique
of Rational Institutionalism

MARLENE WIND

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ROBERT SCHUMAN CENTRE



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BADIA FIESOLANA, SAN DOMENICO (FI)

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European University Institute
Badia Fiesolana
I – 50016 San Domenico (FI)
Italy**

Introduction¹

'To move Europe forward one has to *make believe*. Things are not what they seem - the first treaty looked like a narrow agreement on coal and steel but was the foundation for far-reaching political union' (*The European*, 1 April 1994).¹

How do we theoretically assess the contemporary dynamics of European integration? This is the opening question in much recent literature on the European Union (EU). However, cooperation between Western European states has puzzled theoreticians of international relations since the EC's foundation in 1957. The research agenda has not only included those more substantial or concrete queries which students of international politics and institutions always have to deal with, but just as many disagreements over how the phenomenon 'the EC' - now the European Union - can be categorized within the classical IR-literature. As William Wallace (1983) has put it, the EC is 'less than a federation, more than a regime', and as I will argue in this chapter the chosen analytical framework or point of departure has significant implications for our empirical conclusions. This means that the way we perceive 'reality' - here the transformation of Europe - will be intimately linked to the assumptions underlying our chosen theoretical perspective, or as John Ruggie has put it:

how we think about transformation fundamentally shapes what we look for; what we look for obviously has an effect on what we find; if we look for signs of transformation through the lenses of the conventional structural approach [neorealism MW] of our discipline we are unlikely to conclude that anything much is happening out there; but we cannot say whether or not that conclusion is correct because the epistemological biases of that approach are such that it is ill-equipped to detect signs of transformation (1989:32).

One of the consequences of taking such a point of departure is that what becomes crucial is not a 'test' of the explanatory validity of any given theory and its relation to an assumed 'objective reality', but rather a scrutiny of the credibility of a given theory's more basic underlying claims (Hollis and Smith, 1990). This 'constructivist position' does not imply that we should stop analyzing social phenomena through specific theoretical frameworks only that any one theory cannot be said to be more or less correct - perhaps only more or less convincing.² No analysts have an unmediated access to the world they

¹ Forthcoming in K.E. Jorgensen (ed.), *Reflectivist Approaches to European Governance*, London, New-York, MacMillan (1997).

study; facts don't speak for themselves. All social phenomena, concepts as well as practices, are historically produced and we will never be able to know the features of the world without having a discourse about them (Onuf, 1989: 37; Quine 1961).

One implication of this position is that it is necessary to get to the ontological and epistemological bones of the theories challenged. In the present chapter this means primarily rationalist theories of European integration. During the last forty years a host of theories and perspectives have been launched to explain European integration. Even today new theories, or rather new variations of older ones, seem to be popping up all the time with new and more rationalist versions of intergovernmentalism having experienced a particular growth in popularity - most significantly among American scholars. It is a general contention of this book that rationalist approaches to 'European Governance' are insufficient and in many cases even directly misleading when it comes to detecting the often rather subtle elements of transition.

One way of demonstrating why this is the case is to scrutinize the ontological claims of these theories, that is, their assumptions about causal mechanisms and their ideas about where change in the international system originates. To put it differently, how are actors constituted in the world and how does a particular ontology influence a theory's epistemology and methodology? Such queries have in recent writings on IR-theory been referred to as the agent-structure debate (Wendt 1987; Hollis and Smith 1990; Carlsnaes 1992, 1993). A brief elaboration of these propositions and their relevance for the study of European integration will be launched below. The metatheoretical endeavour in this chapter may seem far-fetched when focusing upon a phenomena like European integration. It should therefore be made explicit from the outset, that what I pursue in this essay is not a metatheoretical discussion for its own sake. My overall ambition is to show that metatheoretical and theoretical discussions are *absolutely crucial* for our ability to make sense of empirical findings.

Rationalism, Reflectivism and the Study of European Integration

The controversy between rationalism and reflectivism has by now become a conventional reference-point (Keohane 1988; Rittberger 1993). It follows from this distinction that if we focus on ontological assumptions and related explanatory claims, it becomes increasingly meaningless to emphasize the differences rather than the obvious similarities between current *neoliberal* and *neorealist* intergovernmentalist approaches to the study of international institutions. Both belong to the rationalist camp and both work from individualist assumptions. The world they see is anarchial and cooperation among states is

difficult but, under certain conditions, not completely impossible (Keohane/Axelrod 1986; Nye 1988). Many things suggest that what we can expect in the years to come is a (hopefully) fruitful discussion between these rational institutionalist approaches on the one hand and a more agencystructure integrated reflective-institutionalist position on the other.

Predictions about where Europe is moving will to a very large extent depend upon in which of these two camps one situates one self. If one puts on intergovernmentalist glasses (neorealist or neoliberal) one will find that only very few changes have - or can be expected to occur. Power and sovereignty is - it seems - eternally retained in the member-states. The state is the most significant actor in the integration process and decides on the speed and depth of cooperation through 'big bargains' in the European Council. If, on the other hand, one adopts a position in the - admittedly - much more diffuse reflectivist camp - few things are predictable or even certain. Whether the state is the most important actor and indeed capable of directing and controlling the process is *the* crucial *empirical* question to be analyzed. So is the question of whom is sovereign in contemporary Europe.

Without specifying what a reflectivist approach to European integration might entail (the remaining chapters in this book will provide some answers to this query), it is safe to say that reflectivism is much more historical and process-oriented. This does not imply, however, that what a reflectivist position can offer is 'just another narrative'. Reflectivists want to understand *as well as* explain current changes. The understanding/explanation dichotomy is therefore misplaced - produced by those who seek to monopolize the discipline with their belief in 'true' scientific rigor. The question is not whether one explains or understands any given process - but how. As Skinner has put it: 'What distinguishes a mere bodily movement from an action is the meaning of that movement' (1988: 80-1, 91). Reflectivists are just as rationalists interested in observing behavior but if the historical meaning context of action is left out, we are left with little knowledge about particular events.

The agent-structure debate in IR began in the 1980s as a critique of Kenneth Waltz' neorealist theory (Wendt 1987; Dessler 1989; Ashley 1986). Waltz (1979) gave no room for what he called 'second image theories', that is, theories which draw on domestic or institutional factors when explaining the state behavior. Only a systemic approach, he argued, can explain and predict state-action. This claim triggered the agent-structure dispute which is somewhat different from the rationalist-reflectivist debate which is our concern here and which has influenced theoretical discussion since the late 1980s. As noted above this theoretical turn is more than anything due to the merge of neorealist and neoliberalist IR-paradigms. They now represent one single minimalist position based on rational-choice assumptions (Wæver 1992; 1994; Wendt 1992;

Kratochwil and Ruggie 1986; Hollis and Smith 1990: 393-410). This leads to my second substantial claim, namely that in explaining a phenomenon like European integration, the rationalist approach is insufficient and often directly misleading. Because of its focus on the EU as 'just' a classical international regime utilized by European states to maximize their power and general welfare, it is - in its ontological assumptions and concrete research-design - completely insensitive to the working of dynamic institutional orders (Ruggie 1993a).

In the mainstream literature, regimes have generally been characterized as consisting of 'principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures'.³ However, because most modern regime theory explains the set up and persistence of institutions on the basis of rational-choice theory, they a priori exclude themselves from detecting the evolution of institutions produced through norm-based state practices (Kratochwil and Ruggie 1986). As indicated above, the theories will also be unequipped to conceive of structural transformation in the international system: the territorial state will live on forever. One very fundamental problem with the rationalist position and with classical regime theory, is that norms, rules and practices (important in world politics as in all other social relations) do not work as the instrumental *causes* we are familiar with from the natural sciences and in neoclassical economics (Hollis and Smith 1990: 72-3). However, it is exactly on such assumptions that rationalism rests.

One of the consequences of adopting a static and atomist theoretical position is that state-interests become exogenous to process. Therefore, in the concrete analysis of European integration the rationalist theories easily end up as self-fulfilling prophecies. To put it differently, if it is assumed a priori that state-preferences can be ranked quite easily and that they stay the same in spite of interaction with other states and the impact of institutional dynamics, few changes will be detectable.

Because the discussion between rationalists and reflectivists within the IR field has to start at a metatheoretical level, the following section will demonstrate how we can gain significant insights from debates on similar issues in other fields. This can not only help us avoiding oversimplifications and hazardous conclusions, but more importantly, when dealing with institutional questions at a metatheoretical level, it makes little sense to stay within narrow disciplinary confines. It is, in other words, crucial to stress that there is absolutely nothing unique about the rationalism-reflectivism controversy in IR-theory. The fact that only a few (rather marginal?) scholars within the field have taken the debate seriously so far only suggests that the majority of IR-scholars are badly equipped when it comes to basic theoretical innovation.

Rational Institutionalism and Institutional Rationalization

Within the last decade two major books - James March and Johan P. Olsen's *Rediscovering Institutions: The Organizational Basis of Politics* (1989), and James Coleman's *The Foundations of Social Theory* (1990) - have had an impressive impact on our thinking and theorizing within the social sciences. The two strands of thought represented by these books have, through the history of the social sciences, been regarded as more or less incommensurable. Just like in the rationalist-reflectivist debate, both works can be categorized as institutional if one understands institutions rather broadly (Thelen and Steinmo 1992: 4-5, 7-10).⁴ The books do, however, have very divergent ideas of the relation between agents and structures when explicating institutional developments and this is exactly of our interest here.

The fundamental analytical differences to be found in *Foundations of Social Theory* and *Rediscovering Institutions* are equally present in the work of classical sociologists like Durkheim, Tönnies and Weber. These authors emphasized the difference between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, and between *Vergesellschaftung* and *Vergemeinschaftung*. The first distinction can be found in Tönnies's work, and the other in Weber's. Also Durkheim made the distinction in his critique of utilitarianism. In modern political theory parallel distinctions can be found in the debate between so-called liberalists such as John Rawls, Robert Nozick and Ronald Dworkin on the one hand and communitarians like Charles Taylor, Michael Sandal, Alisdair MacIntyre and Michael Walzer on the other.⁵ The same tension can be found in comparative politics⁶ and in international relations where the divide can be traced much further back in history than I account for here. One well-known debate was Hedley Bull's classical attack on American behavioralism in 1969 and generally the distinction between 'society' and system-approaches to the study of world politics.⁷

In his book, James Coleman draws on utilitarian political thought and neo-classical economic theory. His explanation of human action is rational-individualist in orientation, conceiving of human beings as able to rank preferences and make choices independently of social norm-structures. Coleman regards norms and rules in social life as something we, as free agents, *choose* to take into consideration when we find it useful for achieving certain purposes. Norms and institutions are not constitutive for action but exogenous and controllable instrumental tools. The important thing is of course that we find exactly the same instrumental conception of norms and rules in the mainstream regime-literature.⁸

For March and Olsen such a voluntaristic picture of human interaction does not make much sense. In relying on classical sociology and anthropology their perspective is clearly much more structural, while keeping space for

intentional action. They argue that socialization into institutions and what they call 'rules of appropriateness' take place *prior* to the actors adoption of a certain 'goal' or 'interest'. The rules and norms thereby shape the actors adherence to a certain idea or vision of what is 'reasonable' or if you prefer - rational behavior (1989: 23; 1994; see also Kratochwil 1989).

The American economist, Paul Samuelsson, once argued that 'Economics is concerned with rational action, and sociology with the irrational' (1983: 90). Such a simplistic contention would obviously not even approximate March and Olsen's understanding if we, for the sake of the argument, regard them as sociologists. What they conceive of as *rule constituted behavior* has not the least to do with irrationality, quite the contrary (see also Caporaso 1993a: 75). To March and Olsen, action can easily be both strategic and rulebased at the same time, in fact most human action is. Thus it would be very much beside the point to call rule- and normbased behavior irrational. The important thing is whether or not action can be understood properly outside a particular meaning-constituting-context which might tell us something about the way actors rationalize their deeds. Rationalists pretend that preferences, strategies and choices can be ranked and predicted outside time and space. For theorists like March and Olsen on the other hand, such assumptions simply run against ordinary experience. Almost everything humans do is rational in the sense of being meaningful. However, action and reasoning about action is bounded by history and culture. Consequently, characterizing raindance among aboriginals in Australia or ritual and ceremony in negotiations in modern international politics as 'irrational symbolism' would be fundamentally misleading (see also Winch 1958).⁹

Following this line of argument, the interesting thing to try to grasp is the exact relation between an act and its reference. Analyzing legitimization procedures of performed and future deeds is what becomes crucial here (Onuf 1994). In sum, understanding 'rational-action' necessarily requires knowledge about more than rational actors' assumed intentions, motives and an ahistorical preference-ranking.

Still, a modern sociologist like Coleman would probably disagree even more than March and Olsen with Samuelsson's contention. This is not because Coleman follows March and Olsen's stress on rules, norms and practices and therefore conceives of rationality differently from Samuelsson, quite the contrary. Coleman would disagree because he holds that the ontological and epistemological divide between the two fields within the social sciences no longer makes sense. As Coleman (1990) argues, all types of social action including norm- and rule-based behavior, can be subsumed and thereby explained with the point of departure in neo-classical economics. The same contention can be found in another article where he concludes that as the

twentieth century draws to a close: 'The decline of primordial social organization has been accompanied by a loss of informal social capital on which social control depended' (Coleman 1993:1). Compare this rather heady claim with March and Olsen's opposite contention that: 'Modern politics are as replete with symbols, ritual, ceremony, and myth as the societies more familiar to (the) anthropological tradition...Control over symbols is a basis of power, like control over other resources and the use of symbols is part of a struggle over political outcomes' (1989: 7).

According to Coleman, norms, rules and codes of conduct produced historically in social practice just do not correspond to the efficiency, rationality and cost-effect calculations of modern enlightened individuals. Following norms is something belonging to a very early stage of human development. We are therefore left with the type of action-reaction chains that can be measured rather easily in causal utility-functions - very similar to the classical Hobbesian image of how social orders are established and maintained. In the Hobbesian world of nature, rule-following fundamentally depends on the existence of threats by physical sanctions.

The understanding of social orders and norms as fundamentally dependent on formal authorities and rewards is in other words still very much alive and kicking - not only in realist IR-theory - but within all those social science disciplines which adhere to microeconomic theory as the basis for understanding social order (Kratochwil 1989; Onuf 1989, 1991; Wind 1996a).

From the discussion above it becomes quite evident that we are dealing with two very different ontological claims about institutional dynamics and about the relationship between agents and structures. This is an interesting observation in itself and the object of highly advanced intellectual discussions in bulks of current sociological and political-theory journals (see Wildavsky 1994; Keohane and Ostrom 1994). The important thing to stress here is, however, slightly different. What needs to be made explicit is that the agent/structure constellations we are facing in the theories we encounter inside and outside the IR-field, are determining the 'appropriate' epistemology and methodology - to use March and Olsen's terminology. Following a reflectivist position, exactly this point has most often been overlooked in IR-debates over which theory or methodology is most useful for studying certain empirical phenomena. This implies moreover, that not only ontology but also the research design come to set very narrow limits to our empirical conclusions (Giddens 1985).

Because, as the reflectivists would contend, there is and always will be an intimate linkage between our making sense of the world and social action, the entire idea of interpreting a motive or a national interest/strategy prior to or outside the constitutive context, will be highly problematic (Kratochwil 1982, 1989). As Thelen and Steinmo put it 'people don't stop at every choice they

make in their life and think to themselves, 'Now what will maximize my self-interest?' Instead, most of us, most of the time, follow socially defined rules, even when doing so may not be directly in our self-interest' (1993: 8; see also DiMaggio and Powell 1991). From this follows that theories which work with the notion of rational action, where preferences and values are fixed and defined prior to interaction itself, often become mere ad hoc or after-rationalizations. Put differently, in Western culture we are brought up to see causal mechanisms and utility-maximizing action in everything we do and observe, and we will therefore be inclined always to interpret events *as if* they were products of pre-given preference-hierarchies.

Regardless of the above (from a reflectivist point of view) very sensible contentions, there is probably little doubt that Coleman's work belongs much more to today's mainstream in the social sciences than March and Olsen's. It represents more than anything the idea that society and macro-phenomena in general are generated through the aggregation of individual interests and preferences. The fascination with the methodology of neo-classical economics and generally the vision of economics - as *superior* to other social sciences disciplines has been quite evident since the Second World War (Bernstein 1983: 22-7).¹⁰ These two things, that is, the adoption of microeconomic theory's atomist understanding of social action and the fascination with economics as a science, go closely together and account for the growing popularity of rational choice theory.

This leads us from a general debate of institutions, actors and structures in social theory to a more specific discussion of 'The state of the Art' of contemporary integration theory. In the following I will focus on mainly three questions which are all related to the overall theme of making sense of European integration, i) what are the basic assumptions of rational institutionalism in terms of agency and structure; ii) what are the main weaknesses of the alleged assumptions when studying international transformation; iii) which type of facts are excluded from examination when rationalist perspectives are applied, and what are the overall consequences of this when trying to make sense of European integration?

Rational-Institutionalism and European Integration

I launched two propositions at the beginning of this chapter. My first was that it becomes increasingly unfruitful to distinguish neorealist and neoliberalist approaches to European integration rather than to work with them as one single rational-institutionalist position. Utilizing game theoretical metaphors, both are individualist in their explanatory origins and in their conception of institutions.

The main point of divergence remains the rather artificial dispute over relative and absolute gains (Grieco 1988; Mastanduno 1991). In the following I will try to explicate the consequences of adopting a rational-institutionalist approach for our making sense of Europe.

A critical assessment of the rational-institutionalist perspective on European cooperation implies a focus on some specific metatheoretical problems which relates directly to the problematization of the individualist understanding of institutions. A second step will be to scrutinize how such an understanding affects the more concrete empirical level of analysis. My argument here is that a rationalist position is insufficient when we are to grasp actual state practice exactly because rationalists don't take institutions seriously enough.

It was the individualist assumptions of Waltz's *Theory of International Politics* which cleared the ground for an individualist based synthesis between neorealism and neoliberalism. Even though Waltz's ambition was to promote a structural theory of international politics, many have pointed out that his assumptions about self-help in the international system were based on a utilitarian and individualist ontology. In fact, Waltz makes this stance clear by referring to microeconomic theory throughout his book and he explicitly compares the balance of power-system with the theory of equilibrium in neo-classical economic theory (1979: 54-5, 72-4, 89-94, 118). As noted by John Ruggie 'the international system is formed...like a market: it is individualistic in origin, and more or less spontaneously generated as a by-product of the actions of its constitutive units' (1986). Ashley (1986) was among the first to point out neorealism's individualist basis, but Wendt (1987, 1992) caught more attention when he made parallel points some years later. Wendt's critique is important in this context because it illustrates the consequences of letting a supposedly structural theory rest on an individualist ontology:

Waltz seems to be a holist, but in fact he treats the self regarding identities and interests of states as given prior to interaction...by taking the properties of his units of analysis as given and not addressing how these are produced by interaction, Waltz' theory is based on de facto individualism (1992: 182; see also Wendt and Duvall 1989: 55; Dessler 1989: 449).

Because the rational institutionalists adopt a realist understanding of international politics as the basis for analysis, their conception of the EC institutional environment is understood as economists generally conceive of institutions - as a voluntarily established facilitating system in which otherwise self-regarding actors can pursue their own interests (Moravcsik 1991, 1993; Keohane and

Hoffmann 1991). Caporaso has defined the link between realism and rational institutionalism in the following manner:

the fundamental contribution of regime theory is to move realism (if it is still realism) out of its zero-sum world and to use the theory of games to ask what kinds of arrangements (institutional arrangements) actors would devise under different types of incentives. The approach is clearly and unapologetically state-centered, self-interested, and methodologically individualist. It does not explain cooperation or institution-building as emanations of 'community goodwill', common values, shared loyalties, or collective identities. Instead it wants to explain outcomes, including institutional outcomes as products of self-interested calculations. In short, regime theory strives to provide a micro-basis for international institutions (1993b: 482).

'Self-interested calculations' is the core term here and used as micro-foundation in the most ambitious contemporary intergovernmentalist approaches to integration. Before I go deeper into my critique of the individualist basis of the rationalist research programme and especially its understanding of institutions, it should be stressed that the rationalists themselves see individualism as a *strength* and not, as I present it here, as a major problem (Jervis 1978; 1988; Keohane 1984; see also Caporaso 1993b: 485). It is crucial to note what 'strength' denotes here. Clearly, it is not empirical accuracy but rather theoretical generalizeability. The adoption of a regime theory perspective makes it possible to analyze all types of institutional cooperation in the same manner. Historical specificity and the character of cooperation is sacrificed to the positivistic quest for general laws.

From Realism to Rational-Institutionalism: Methodological, Ontological and Epistemological Links

A strict neorealist analysis would suggest that European integration was possible only because the distribution of capabilities in the international system had changed from multipolarity to bipolarity after the Second World War. This change meant that the Western European states were no longer responsible for their own security but were 'protected' by NATO and by the new bipolar overlay (Cornett and Caporaso 1992: 244-5; Buzan et al. 1990: 31-41). This structural condition made integration and cooperation possible. Neorealists therefore expected that when the superpower overlay disappeared, the major European powers might start rivalling again like they have done for centuries.

This rather gloomy perspective is a result of the neorealist lack of faith in institutions' stabilizing potential (see Kratochwil 1993b: 70; Ruggie 1993c).

How does the rational institutionalist perspective fit into this, if at all? There is a connection, and it goes through the 'cooperation under anarchy' literature where rational institutionalists were able to combine basic realist assumptions about anarchy and state actors seeking to maximize power and utility *with* stress on institutions (Oye 1986; Baldwin 1993; Rittberger 1993).

As other regime theory perspectives, rational-institutionalists thus work with realist assumptions when analyzing the EU. All it amounts to is therefore what Stanley Hoffmann referred to as: 'a set of norms of behavior and of rules and policies facilitating agreement among the members' (1982: 33). The same point of departure is taken by the majority of more recent publications on the EU (Moravcsik 1991, 1993; Garrett 1992; Grieco 1991; Weber and Wiesmeth 1991; Taylor 1991).

There are, however, several problems of invoking such a perspective to the study of European integration. Not only does a regime-approach reduce the formal EU-institutions to some kind of residual categories which have no or insignificant independent impact on influencing state-interests over time, initiating policy-formulation and so on, but also the EU decision-making environment is attributed very little significance for agenda-setting. However, my critique of rational institutionalism in this context does *not* focus on the importance of formal EU-institutions. This has been done several times before and there is little need to rehearse it here. I will rather emphasize the implications of not giving credit to the *influence of deeper institutional processes* and the way in which these, over time, may change state interests. However, because it is so important for rationalists to invoke theories of institutions and state-action that are applicable to IR-theorizing in general, they would of course refuse to see this as a problem. They have in other words shown a great deal of reluctance with theories that have conceived of regional integration in Europe as something (historically) unique. As Moravcsik makes clear: 'Liberal intergovernmentalism assimilates the EC to models of politics potentially applicable to all states, thereby specifying the conditions under which a similar process of integration may occur elsewhere' (1993: 519). In sum, it would neither be compatible with the basic realist tenet about anarchy and the working of international system, nor with the wish to generalize about states and institutional dynamics and subsequently with the possibility of accumulating knowledge about relations between states, if the EC was considered as anything but a traditional intergovernmental organization (Webb 1977: 17-18). Consequently, epistemology comes to dominate or even determine ontology. Matlary has recently made similar points:

There is a logical connection between how one chooses to conceptualize the EC and one's theoretical ambition. If one chooses IG [intergovernmentalist MW] assumptions the ambition to arrive at generally applicable theory is inherent in these assumptions: the state is an actor like any state, the EC but a regime with the same theoretical status as any other regime. History is not a complicating factor as the theoretical categories are timeless (1994: 7).

How to Comprehend European Integration Theoretically ?

Among the classic integration theories, neofunctionalism has recently been criticized for its lack of solid microfoundations. But what does this mean? Following James Coleman and neoclassical economics, Moravcsik asserts that it is 'widely accepted in social theory in general' that a microfoundation of social action *necessarily* has to do with 'how self-interested actors form coalitions and alliances...and how conflicts among them are resolved' (1993: 477; see also Moravcsik 1992: 14, 30). In order for the analyst to be able to investigate these issues he or she should, following Moravcsik, be able to rank actor preferences and account for actor-constraints prior to the analysis of interaction. Both Moravcsik and Coleman thus hold that interests and preferences can be kept exogenous to the social interaction process. One consequence of this is that important institutional elements such as the evolution and change of norms, ideas and historically produced codes of conduct - discursive as well as behavioral, are completely expelled from analysis. Moreover, social order is related explicitly to the question about how to obtain a (market) equilibrium - or as Hollis and Smith put it: 'in international relations as in economics, there is scope for applying scientific method to the beliefs and desires of individuals. The crucial move is to insist that every individual [or state MW] works basically in the same law-like way, with individual variations depending on systematic differences in, for instance, preferences and information' (1990: 4).

Seen from a metatheoretical and social theory point of view, however, such a micro-foundation is far from self-evident. There is little doubt that the adoption of neoclassical assumptions covers the allegations of today's rational-choice-theory, but Moravcsik's claim that this understanding is widely accepted and therefore 'correct' in some sense, is, as we saw previously, highly contestable. In fact, according to both social theorists like March and Olsen and IR-reflectivists the individualism promoted by rational-institutionalists leaves a lot to be desired. However, as I asserted at the outset of this chapter, the intergovernmentalist position that Moravcsik belongs to represents *the*

mainstream point of departure - not only of today's study of international politics - but increasingly also of European integration-studies.

If we go back to the more concrete question of how to explain European integration and if we adopt a rational-institutionalist perceptive, we are granted to put the question: why is it that states voluntarily cooperate and eventually give away certain powers to a supranational organization? Taking a Hobbesian state of nature as a point of departure for the understanding of European politics today certainly begs some questions. What I am getting at here is that the ontological point of departure of rational-institutionalism (and neorealism) being anarchy and maximization of state interests, puts very narrow limits to what we as analysts can and should be concerned with.

More generally, what characterizes the literature which conceives of the EU as a traditional international organization or regime, is that it is conceptualized as a facilitator and efficiency-arrangement that can help otherwise self-regarding states to obtain strategically defined national goals by the reduction of transaction costs (see Krasner ed., 1983). Consequently, the EU-institutional set-up is regarded as having a concrete purpose as an arena in which states with fixed interests enter into in order to obtain a better bargaining position vis a vis other states (Weber and Wiesmeth 1991: 259; Moravcsik 1993). The understanding of the co-ordinated opening of domestic markets can, as Garrett has argued, be seen: 'in terms of collective action problems. All states would benefit from cooperative arrangements, but there are powerful incentives for individual states to defect' (1992: 533). The EU then provides the states with information, an enduring institutional structure and even sanctioning arrangements that make cooperation easier. The regime-literature here adopts a theory of market exchange found in neo-classical economics. Firms are replaced by states with utility and interest-functions and Pareto-inferior behavior creates a need for arbitration. It is assumed that we are faced with a collective action problem along the following lines: 'Even if the distribution of interests across states revealed potential gains from exchange, many opportunities would be missed due to poor information, lack of trust, incentives to defect, uncertainty regarding the duration of a contract, and ease of escaping detection if contracts are broke' (Cornett and Caporaso 1992: 226). The problem of defection and free-riding is always present in these types of situations, but this condition can be altered - so the argument goes - when iterated games are introduced, that is, when interactions are repeated and when the time-horizon for interaction is extended (Axelrod 1981; Keohane and Axelrod 1986; Weber and Wiesmeth 1991).

From an intergovernmentalist point of view the neofunctionalists have highly overestimated both the independent influence of the Commission and of personalities when studying the integration process. Even though Moravcsik

(1991) grants the Commission a certain impact on the speed of negotiating the SEA in the mid-1980s, the final result reflected the converging interests of the major states. Agreeing with Milward (1992) and Taylor (1991), Moravcsik contends that: 'the unique institutional structure of the EC is acceptable to the national governments only insofar as it strengthens, rather than weakens, their control over domestic affairs, permitting them to attain goals otherwise unachievable' (1993: 507). This point is one of the most problematic in the rational institutionalist research programme. Developments, especially at the legal and institutional level over the past four decades, suggest that the memberstates are far from 'in control' of the process (Wind 1996b; Alter 1995; Weiler 1991,1994). However, to the rational-institutionalists the EU legal institutional framework can best be regarded as a neutral voluntarily installed sanctioning structure, a semi-Leviathan. It is in everybody's long-term interests that certain limited powers to punish transgressors of EC laws and regulation are transferred (Moravcsik 1993: 513; Garrett 1992: 533, 558). Even though both admit that the European Court of Justice has developed powers that go beyond what is 'minimally necessary to perform its functions', as Moravcsik puts it, they both argue that at the end of the day the legal framework does not threaten the sovereignty of the member states, but rather reflects the interests of the major powers (see also Taylor 1991: 121; Garrett and Weingast 1991; compare Burley and Mattli 1993; Snyder 1993; Rasmussen 1986). Moravcsik does in fact see the development of the ECJ's power as an 'anomaly' because - he admits - it has rather significant independent powers that hardly fit into his intergovernmentalist world view.

The rational-institutional perspective has thus focused attention on bargains between major states when explaining European cooperation. As opposed to a mere functional regime-analysis that primarily looks at international cooperation from a facilitating and efficiency-angle concerned with absolute gains, most of the intergovernmentalists who adopt a rationalist design argue that there will always be disputes among states over 'where on the Pareto-curve' agreements will end up (Krasner 1991; Moravcsik 1991, 1993; Garrett 1992; Keck 1993). The claim is that many outcomes can be Pareto-efficient and the chosen solution often will reflect the interest of the most powerful (Caporaso 1993b: 485).

With the point of departure in Hirschman's (1970) theory of 'exit, voice and loyalty', rationalists therefore hold that states often cooperate in enduring institutions and go along with decisions they otherwise would not because of the fear of being excluded from influence. This exact fear of being left out was among the important motivations for the UK to accept the SEA in 1985/86 (Taylor 1991). The fear of being left out and consequently the acceptance of 'lowest common denominator' outcomes in institutional bargaining are, however,

elements that are difficult to analyze in purely functional regime-analysis. Moravcsik in particular has argued that the study (and prediction) of the outcome of specific bargains makes it necessary to take into consideration other political levels as well - especially domestic politics. This point has also been hinted at by Bulmer (1983), Putnam (1988), Matlary (1993b, 1994), and others. While functional regime-theory traditionally has been rather silent on the problem of how states define their bargaining position and interests in specific situations, Moravcsik (1993) has emphasized this aspect. Does his inclusion of domestic politics make his approach more convincing in terms of informing us about the formation of state-interests and preferences? Hardly. Even though one could have expected that a model seeking to integrate domestic politics would have had to give up the unitary actor-assumption, this does not happen. State-interests remain exogenous to the processes at the international level. The point is well made by Wayne Sandholtz when he argues that: 'the intergovernmentalist argument implies that states form their preferences via some hermetic national process, then bring their interests to Brussels' (1993: 3). Put differently, Moravcsik argues for the adoption of a so-called sequential theory where the configuration of a bargaining position based on the aggregation of interest-group preferences at the national level is first analyzed. To sum up, in the concrete rationalist research design an endogenisation of interest-formation is impossible. We are, in other words, dealing with a tautological and infalsifiable theory that a priori closes off any possibility of 'real' changes in power as a result of state interaction.

Both Wendt and Milner have, independently of one another, addressed several of the problems pertaining to the 'cooperation under anarchy' - literature. Wendt argues that it is the ontological conception of anarchy as conceived by the rational institutionalists that makes it impossible to conceptualize a processual endogenizing of state interests over time (1992: 425). Milner makes the same point, noting that it is a contradiction in terms to try to create a dynamic model that takes into consideration domestic politics when one takes the national-international divide for granted as an ontological assumption (1992: 489). It seems that the division of domestic and international spheres, when applied to the EU today, has become more and more obsolete. Almost all aspects of domestic politics in the member-states have an EU-dimension. As noted by Cameron: 'foreign and domestic policies become increasingly intertwined because national political leaders, in negotiating among themselves within the Community, are simultaneously making foreign policy and domestic policy' (quoted in Matlary, 1994: 20).

To this comes that several empirical findings direct our attention to the fact that power is no longer preserved in the classical symbiosis between territory and sovereignty. As Christiansen has put it: 'The European Community

has created a situation in which it becomes impossible to maintain the principle of sovereignty as the foundation of political life' (1994: 6; see also Wæver 1991). This point also emphasizes the increasing relevance of taking into consideration several other regional and multinational actors on the international scene when the degree of European and international transformation is to be assessed.

Concluding Remarks

Several scholars have argued that the EU appears more and more anomalous to classic conceptions of sovereignty and international cooperation (Ruggie 1993c; Pierson 1995; Sbragia 1993; Schmitter 1991). Rather than being 'just' another international organization, it seems that what we envisage in Europe today is a novel system of rule that not only questions our Westphalian vision of what international politics is all about but equally challenges the individualist ontological and methodological assumptions on which all rationalist integration theories are based. If the symbiosis between power and territory can be fundamentally questioned, it simply does not make sense to analyze state action in game-theoretical terms with states as the main players. It thus seems that IR theorists in the future should try to rely more on their own expertise as analysts of international transitions and rid themselves of their well known but very unfruitful inferiority-complex towards economics. Adopting microeconomic methodology might make us better modelers of the world. Yet the question is how much 'violence' we should allow ourselves to do to the world in order to make it fit into such - admittedly - beautiful and parsimonious equations.

The Nobel Price winner Gary Becker once noted that 'economists generally have had little to contribute, especially in recent times, to the understanding of how preferences are formed. Preferences are assumed not to change substantially over time, nor to be very different between wealthy and poor persons, or even between persons in different societies and cultures.' (1976: 5). There is little doubt that the assumption of static and exogenous state-preferences is one of the most vulnerable spots for contemporary rational institutionalism. Yet the problem is much more fundamental than 'just' searching for a theory that endogenizes preference formations at the international level. We should rather be looking for a much better way of understanding institutions and institutional change. Transaction-economics has a serious individualist bias that makes it unequipped to take into account the way institutional practices, over time, (unintendedly) influence and change state preferences.

When looking at Europe today there are, in other words, many good reasons to question conventional wisdom. This might imply that we will have

to begin theoretical innovation from the ground up. In fact, such an endeavour should be welcomed. There is, however, no need to start completely from scratch. Scholars from other social science disciplines have already a solid body of theory, on which we can and ought to draw. We thus need to introduce a much more temporal frame of analysis if we wish a better conception of where an institution like the EU is moving. The fact that conventional IR approaches tend to focus and deduce predictions about integration on discrete bargains make them fundamentally unalert of the way initial decisions made - for instance by the Council - might, over time, have crucial, unintended institutional effects that completely change the 'game' as it was originally conceived (Wind 1996b; Pierson 1995). Institutions are not just passive environments for action. They more often than not develop a life of their own which can be extremely difficult for its architects to control. A good example is developments in EU law and regulation. Even though the EU was founded on a classical international treaty, over the decades it has developed much further towards ordinary constitution than was ever anticipated or even wanted by the member-state governments (Weiler 1991; 1994; Burley and Mattli 1993). New revealing studies show that it has been impossible for states to prevent this from happening despite the fact that member states on several occasions objected, for instance, to the rulings by the European Court of Justice. Other 'constructivist' studies have focused more on the way national administrative systems have adopted EU regulative practices and show how these changed practices in themselves gradually create a new basis for action that is very far from the original design (Olsen 1995a, 1995b; Bundgård-Pedersen, 1995).

What makes the EU so difficult for political scientists to grapple with theoretically, is, of course, that it is without historical precedent. We are faced with a situation where some of the world's most successful nation-states voluntarily have given away and, it seems, continue to give away power to a supranational body. What will confront IR and EU scholars in the future is exactly how we will meet this challenging new empirical reality theoretically.

Notes

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2. In my use of the word 'constructivism' I rely on Onuf (1989); Giddens (1985); Knorr-Cetina (1988); see also Wind (1996a).
3. See Krasner (1983: 2). I am looking exclusively at these rationalist regime approaches in this essay because they have been used recently by theorists to analyze European integration. See Haas (1989) for an overview of other regime perspectives.
4. They contrast the same two strands of thought as I do. While drawing on many of the same sources, their point of departure is comparative politics, not international relations or social theory. In contrasting the institutional focus of economics versus more historically informed debates they argue that 'the behavioral revolution ultimately spawned not one but two separate institutionalist critiques, one from a historical (what I call reflectivist, MW) and another from the more formal 'rational choice' perspective' (1992: 4-5).
5. It is important to note that while the debate as I present it here and the debate on IR theory to follow is focused strictly on the issue of the relation between ontology, epistemology and methodology - the ongoing discussion between liberalists and communitarians is much more focused on normative theory. The normative debate is centered around whether and how 'a good society' can be imagined. For a good elaboration of the important distinction between these two types of debate, see Avineri and de-Shalit (1992).
6. According to Thelen and Steinmo (1992: 7), the rational-choice-institutionalists in comparative politics includes scholars like Shepsle, Levi, North and Bathes, while the more reflective-historical-institutionalists include people like Berger, Hall, Katzenstein and Skocpol.
7. See Rengger (1992) for a brief, excellent account for the debate between liberals and communitarians and their relation to international relations theory.
8. Kratochwil (1989) has especially made these points. See Wind (1996a) for the argument that the instrumental understanding of norms and rules can be found among several 18th and 19th century international legal theorists as well as among realists.
9. There are several parallels between March and Olsen's position and Winch's position. As argued by Winch (1958: 52): 'all behavior which is meaningful (therefore specifically human behavior) is ipso facto rule-governed'. See Onuf (1974, 1991) and Cohen (1981) for a discussion of the importance of ritual and ceremony in modern international politics.

10. The same problematique has been a dominant theme in poststructural IR-debates in the 1980s (see Ashley 1984; Onuf 1989; Smith 1992). See also Hoffmann (1977) for a pathbreaking discussion of the influence of neoclassical economics in IR.

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